



Commonwealth of Massachusetts

RIVERWAYS PROGRAM

Building Partnerships, Protecting Rivers

MASSACHUSETTS RIVER RESTORE PROGRAM

River Restore is dedicated to facilitating, promoting, and implementing river and stream restoration in Massachusetts. River Restore focuses on restoring rivers and streams by removing old and obsolete dams that are no longer serving their original purpose.



April 2000 Silk Mill Dam prior to removal



March 2003 The removal of Silk Mill Dam in Becket restored coldwater species habitat through a portion of Yokum Brook

BENEFITS OF DAM REMOVAL:

- ✓ reduces liability concerns for dam owners, and can eliminate public safety hazards
- ✓ prevents uncontrolled dam breaches, ensuring public and environmental safety
- ✓ restores river habitat and improves fish passage and movement (eliminates the need and cost of fishway operation and maintenance)
- ✓ improves water quality and restores natural water temperatures and oxygen levels
- ✓ restores threatened and endangered species
- ✓ improves sediment transport, by restoring natural water velocities and depths
- ✓ restores and re-connects floodplain and bordering vegetated wetlands
- ✓ saves taxpayers dollars and increases tourism
- ✓ improves public access to the river and eliminates navigational hazards

DAMS IN MASSACHUSETTS

More than 3,000 dams fragment rivers and streams in Massachusetts – more than one for every three miles of river. Most dams were constructed before 1900 for water supply, industrial mill use, power supply, and recreation.

Federal, state, municipal, and private owners share ownership of these dams. Private dam owners may not be aware of their financial and legal responsibilities for dam safety and may not have planned adequately for maintenance, repair, or removal of their dams.

Of the more than 3,000 dams, approximately 350 are rated as High Hazard, approximately 748 are rated as Significant Hazard and the rest are rated as Low Hazard. High Hazard and large size dams pose the greatest threat to life and property. Low Hazard and small size dams may be the greater threat to the environment by blocking fish passage and impairing water quality.

RIVER RESTORE IS dedicated to reconnecting natural and cultural river communities by selective removal of dams and other obstructions. By building interagency communication and cooperation and a network of services for communities and others, RIVER RESTORE will seek ecological restoration and respect concerns for public safety and historic preservation.

RIVER RESTORE IS NOT a campaign to remove all dams. There are dams that may be serving a purpose that should be maintained. But many dams are no longer serving their original purpose and/or are no longer able to contain and pass storm flows safely. The construction cost of removing these dams is often less than repairing them.

MASSACHUSETTS RIVERS RESTORED THROUGH DAM REMOVAL

- ❖ In 2000, the **Old Berkshire Mill Dam** on the East Branch of the Housatonic River in Dalton was removed, doubling the habitat available to the cold water trout fishery.
- ❖ In 2002, the **Billington Street Dam** restored passage for anadromous fish in Town Brook in Plymouth in the first coastal dam removal in Massachusetts.
- ❖ In 2003, the Yokum Brook Restoration Project removed the **Silk Mill Dam** from Yokum Brook, a tributary to the West Branch of the Westfield River in the town of Becket, restoring five miles of coldwater fisheries habitat by eliminating a barrier to Atlantic salmon migration and the movement of resident trout and other coldwater species.

PROGRAM SERVICES

Technical Assistance

River Restore is developing methodologies and guidelines for sampling and managing impounded sediments, working in partnership with the U.S. Geological Survey with funding from the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection and Department of Conservation and Recreation.

Permit Guide and Timeline

River Restore is managing development of a guide to the regulatory requirements for dam removal and fact sheets about the process of dam removal.

Policy

River Restore is identifying opportunities to provide incentives for proactive restoration projects involving dam removal.

PROGRAM ACTION STEPS

- ☐ **PRIORITIZE** stream segments for restoration projects using ecological, public safety and local interest criteria.
- ☐ **INVENTORY AND MAP** all dam locations and complete the DCR Dam Safety database.
- ☐ **DEVELOP** an Index of Environmental Risk to prioritize dams that threaten and impact environmental resources (funded by the MA Environmental Trust).
- ☐ **ASSIST** municipalities, agencies, and private dam owners with regulatory, funding and outreach strategies
- ☐ **RESPECT** historic, cultural, and recreational uses and values.
- ☐ **COOPERATE** with participating regulatory and management agencies to ensure timely and appropriate decisions.
- ☐ **OUTREACH** to interested individuals and groups about factors influencing the decision-making process for dam removal.

River Restore - Riverways Program

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